Dr. Martha L. Corry

Martha L. Corry was born and raised in Springfield, Ohio. She was always proud of her Midwest background and when she moved to New York she was frequently referred to as the “Lady from Ohio.” When her father passed away at a relatively young age, her uncle guided and assisted her as she pursued a career in pre-collegiate teacher education, one of the few professional paths available to women at the time. In 1941 she graduated from Ohio State University earning a B.A. degree and a B.S. in Education degree. Based on her strong scholastic work associated with her liberal arts B.A. degree she was inducted as a lifetime member into Phi Beta Kappa, the Nation's oldest and most widely known academic honor society. She worked her way through college when the country was experiencing the Great Depression and started her teaching career at the secondary education level during World War II. After the war she elected to follow her intellectual interest in geography and entered the graduate program at the University of Iowa where she received her M.A. and PhD in geography. While at the university she learned Russian, and her doctoral dissertation dealt with studying the physical landscape of the Siberian Far East.

In September 1951 she joined the faculty at SUNY Oneonta, which just had been renamed from the Oneonta Normal School to the State University College of Education, also known as the State Teacher’s College. She was the College’s first formally trained geographer. The curriculum was basically centered on supporting the teacher education program. She became the Coordinator of Geography and taught Introduction to Geography, Economic Geography, Geography of the U.S.S.R. and Geography of Anglo America. During the 1950s and 1960s she studied abroad extensively by participating in several instructional/research overseas programs. In the summer of 1954 she attended the University of Geneva in Switzerland. In August and September of 1958 she spent 30 days in the Soviet Union on a program entitled Comparative Education Field Study in the U.S.S.R. This trip was made during the height of the Cold War and few Americans were allowed to enter the Soviet Union. Although her travels in the Soviet Union focused on the large cities of western Russia she was able to visit a communal farm near Kiev. In 1962 she participated in the Fulbright Summer Institute in Indian Civilization held at Osmania University in Hyderabad, India. For six weeks during
the summer of 1967 she again visited the Soviet Union. This time she was with a group of professional geographers and they traveled across the country on the Trans Siberian Railway. While on the train her camera and pictures disappeared, just a reminder that she was in a state controlled environment.

In the early 1960s Oneonta became a College of Arts and Sciences within SUNY and again was renamed, this time to State University of New York College at Oneonta. The primary purpose of the College was expanded to include formal programs in the liberal arts. Twelve new programs including geography were the college’s first approved liberal arts offerings. In the fall of 1963, the college started accepting students into these programs. Dr. Corry was the force behind getting the liberal arts geography program established. She designed the program’s curriculum and worked throughout the 1960s and 1970s obtaining the resources and faculty to offer the program. Thus, she was the founder of the geography program and in 1970 when the Geography Department was established she became the first chair.

In 1984 she retired to Florida and spent her summers in Oneonta. In 1998, John Corry, her cousin, and other members of the Corry family established in her honor the endowed scholarship program known as the Dr. Martha L. Corry Scholarship. The scholarship was presented to her on her 80th birthday. Over the years the scholarship has provided financial help to geography majors with strong academic records. It continues to grow and will assist many geography majors into the future. At about the same time the Dr. Martha L. Corry Faculty Fellow in Geography was established at Ohio State University, one of the top geography graduate programs in the country. This fellowship is awarded to a geography faculty member for a four year period to enhance his/her research interest.

As shown in the adjacent picture taken around 2005 Dr. Corry remained an active supporter of the discipline of geography and the geography program at Oneonta. The jacket that she was wearing was a map of the world. She passed away on May 29, 2015 at the age of 96.

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